

# Pruning Shrubs

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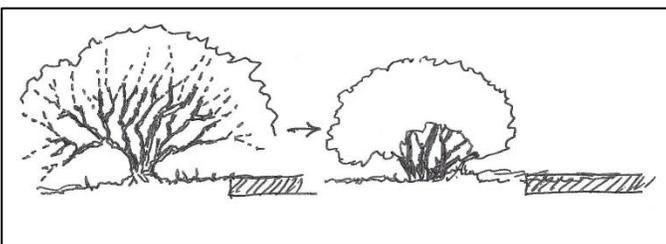


Pruning is an important part of landscape maintenance and is done for a number of reasons. A plant's appearance is important for the well-groomed garden, and pruning may be done to alter the plants shape, height or width. In some cases, an old, overgrown shrub may be rejuvenated by proper pruning and pruning may be used to help a plant recuperate from damage and disease. Pruning should never be done without a reason.

## WHY DO WE PRUNE?

### Pruning for Safety

Safety pruning is done to prevent damage to people or property. For security purposes, prune shrubs that obscure the entry to your home or limit visibility. Pruning is also done to manage intruding branches that may threaten the safety of individuals and vehicles. On walkways and roads, safety pruning is done to allow better visibility and safer access. Proper plant selection and placement will help reduce, but not entirely eliminate, the need for safety pruning.



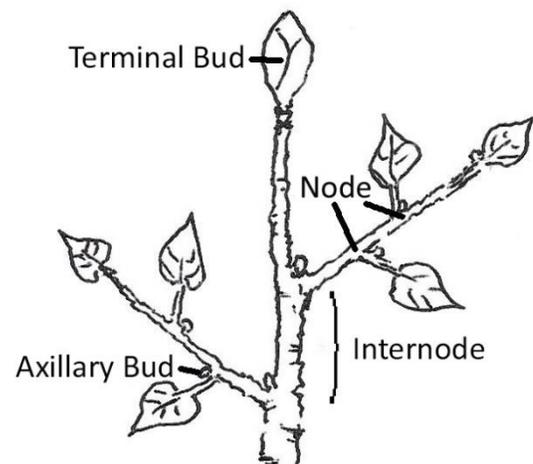
**Figure 1.** Plant growth over a driveway or sidewalk needs to be pruned back for safety.

### Pruning to Improve Plant Health or Vigor

Sometimes branches of shrubs die from weather, from old age, or are damaged by injury or disease. Dead, diseased, or damaged plant material needs to be identified and resolved. Pruning is one of the best ways to correct or eliminate the problem.

### Pruning to Control Plant Form or Size

Shrubs require maintenance pruning to keep them healthy and in scale with their surroundings. There are a number of acceptable ways to reduce plant size. Heading or heading back removes currently growing or one-year-old shoots back to a bud or an internode. Thinning or thinning cuts are used to train young plants, to shorten branches, to control direction of growth, and to remove unwanted branches.



**Figure 2.** Position of buds, nodes, and internodes on a plant.

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### Pruning to Rejuvenate

Rejuvenation pruning usually involves severely cutting back stems of shrubs. This type of pruning is successful used on suckering, fast growing, overgrown leggy shrubs. Rejuvenation pruning is accomplished by cutting back the plant to strong, large stems to redevelop the main framework of branches. If possible, this type of pruning is done over several years to prevent shock to the plant.

### WHEN DO WE PRUNE?

The best time of year to prune a shrub depends on what kind of plant it is. Pruning at different seasons triggers different responses. Late winter or early spring, before bud break, is usually the best time to prune many species because new tissue forms rapidly. However, pruning should be delayed for most spring-blooming shrubs until immediately after flowering to avoid reducing the flowering response.

### Pruning for Flowering and/or Fruit

Proper timing of pruning can help ensure good flowering and/or fruiting. • In general, if a plant blooms in the spring, then they bloom on old season growth and the plants should be pruned directly after blooming. If they bloom later in summer, then the blooms occur on new growth, and the plants can be pruned in their dormant season or before growth begins in the spring.

### HOW DO WE PRUNE?

#### Pruning Tools

All backyard pruning can be done with just three or four single hand tools. If a job calls for power tools,

it is probably not a pruning job and you should seek a trained professional.

A pair of hand pruners is a necessity. select the pruner that has a comfortable grip and is best suited for the job you intend to do.

There are two styles of hand pruners: *Bypass* which uses scissor-like cutting (cutting blade passes by the hook) of fresh, green limbs and branches, and *Anvil* which have a straight-edged blade that cuts against a soft metal anvil. They are ideal for cutting harder, dead wood and should not be used on live stems as it will crush it rather than leave a smooth cut. Both are used for branches typically no larger than 0.5 inches in diameter.

*Loppers* are long-handled pruning shears that require two hands to use, providing additional leverage while making larger cuts up to 3 inches depending on the recommended cutting capacity.

*Pruning Saws* are for branches greater than 1-inch in diameter. Pruning saws have curved blades designed to cut on the pull stroke to help remain in the cutting channel, making cuts quickly and evenly.

*Hedge Shears* have straight blades at least 8 inches long designed to clip soft young growth on hedges and smaller vines. They will not cleanly cut older, harder wood and should not be used in place of hand pruners or loppers.

